

With Passing of Hiroshi Yamauchi, Nintendo of America Retains Ownership of Seattle Mariners

Written by Maury Brown

Thursday, 19 September 2013 16:08



Hiroshi Yamauchi, the man listed as majority owner of the Seattle Mariners, and a key figure that headed Nintendo from 1994 to 2002, passed away at the age of 85 on Thursday in Kyoto, Japan. The cause was complications from pneumonia.

The Mariners released a statement saying:

The Seattle Mariners organization is deeply saddened by the passing today of Mr. Hiroshi Yamauchi. His leadership of Nintendo is legendary worldwide. His decision in 1992 to purchase the Mariners franchise and keep Major League Baseball in Seattle as a "gesture of goodwill to the citizens of the Pacific Northwest" is legendary in this region. Mr. Yamauchi will be remembered for his role in moving forward the opportunity for Japanese baseball players to play in the United States. He will forever be a significant figure in Mariners Baseball history.

The impact of Yamauchi on the history of the Mariners and Major League Baseball marked one of the key turning points in both their history. The club was floundering under former owner Jeff

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Smulyan and on the verge of being relocated to Tampa Bay where a new domed ballpark had been built. Senator Slade Gordon from Washington convinced Yamauchi to purchase the club for \$100 million and keep the Mariners in Seattle. Smulyan had purchased the club for \$76 million in 1989 from George Argyros.

It was an unexpected move. At the time, there was no international ownership presence and initially then commissioner Fay Vincent and four owners rejected the sale approval, but they eventually relented under the condition that the Chairman and President of the club be American partners.

Under the ownership, the Mariners became contenders in 1995 and eventually moved out of the Kingdome and into Safeco Field in July of 1999. Without Yamauchi, the fate of the Mariners would have been quite different.

Yamauchi likely saw ownership of the Mariners as more of an interesting addition to his portfolio rather than purchasing the club due to a passion for baseball. He never attended a Mariners game, even when they and the A's played two exhibition games in Tokyo and Ichiro was still with the club. As the team has languished in the standings, questions about whether there has been a passionate connection to winning at the ownership level has grown. The club has steadfastly denied those assertions.

The question now is, who takes over as the majority owner of the Mariners? While Mr. Yamauchi retained the title of majority owner of the Mariners, he sold his majority interest in the club in 2004 to Nintendo of America and was asked to retain that title at the request of Nintendo of America's Board of Directors. In that, the ownership of the club remains unchanged in the wake of Mr. Yamauchi's passing. Nintendo of America remains the majority owner of the club, and will be listed as the majority owner.



Maury Brown is the Founder and President of the [Business of Sports Network](#), which includes The Biz of Baseball, The Biz of Football, The Biz of Basketball and The Biz of Hockey. He [writes for Baseball Prospectus](#) and is a

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